Enrico looking at the snuff-box he had found. She turned round and knew unmistakably that this was the Duke of Ingatestone. He was tall, broad-shouldered, and in evening-dress looked quite magnificent, in fact exactly, she thought, as a duke should.

After a moment's silence the Duke said: "I am told that you have come from Italy to see me, but I have not received warning of your arrival."

Luella walked towards him. "I understand a letter is in the post, Your Grace," she said, "but I think it was unlikely to arrive before we did."

The Duke looked towards Enrico, who had turned from the cabinet into which he had been looking to stare at the Duke curiously. Turning back to Luella, the Duke said: "May I ask who you are?"

Stumbling a little because she was nervous, Luella opened her handbag. "I think, Your Grace," she replied, "this letter will explain everything." She drew out the letter that Signor Vecchio had given to her and handed it to the Duke.

He took it from her and said: "I am certainly curious as to why you are here so unexpectedly, but I am sure there must be some perfectly reasonable explanation."

Luella drew in her breath.

Looking at the letter which was addressed to him, the Duke walked to a secretaire. Taking up a letter-opener which lay on it he slit open the envelope.

Luella found herself holding her breath as he drew out a sheet of writing-paper, and something else that was in the envelope. She felt as if her heart would stop beating as she waited for what she knew would be a



shock to him. It seemed as if a century passed as the Duke unfolded the writing-paper.

He held what else the envelope had contained in his hand. As he read what was written he stiffened. Then he looked at what the letter had also contained before he asked sharply: "I suppose you are aware of the contents of this letter?"

"N.No . . I was . . only told to bring your . . son to you, and to give . . you the . . letter," Luella answered in a voice that did not sound like her own.

"My son!" the Duke exclaimed scornfully looking at Enrico. "And I presume you are one of the harlots from Vecchio's bawdy house?"

Luella gave a gasp. "Wh.What are you saying?" she stammered.

"Do not try to deceive me," the Duke said. "This is a sheer case of blackmail, and the sooner I turn you and this ridiculous child out of my house, the better."

"I . . I do not . . know what you . . are saying!" Luella exclaimed. "Signor Vecchio asked me to bring your son to England because his mother is dead . . and because I am English."

"You can hardly expect me to believe that is your only reason for coming, if you are part of Vecchio's *maison de plaisir*, as it is called in France, and, doubtless, experienced in blackmail."

The Duke looked down again at the letter in his hand and walked across the room to the window. The light was fading outside, but Luella knew he was staring out as if he thought the setting sun somehow helped him. She was frightened by what he said and the sharp way in which he had spoken. At the same